



Necessary Conditions for Adopting the Great First Eight Curriculum

Thank you for your interest in the Great First Eight Curriculum!

As you consider adopting the curriculum, we want you to be aware of conditions you would need to have or put in place before adopting Great First Eight. You and the teachers who would be implementing the curriculum need a willingness to:

- 1. Use the curriculum in its entirety, at least within an age/grade level.** It is not designed for teachers to use just the family engagement components or just the mathematics portion, for example. The Questions and Answers about the Great First Eight Curriculum document on this page provides more information about why. To note, it is likely that, at some point, a supplemental curriculum will come by, and you may think, "If we implement this supplemental curriculum, I can raise achievement in this one area." The problem is that increased achievement in one area may come at the expense of another area. We strongly encourage you and teachers to implement Great First Eight alone, as we have already done the work to maximize growth in each area without it coming at the expense of another area.
- 2. Leave some previous practices behind.** Retaining practices that you and/or teachers have used in the past but that aren't included in the curriculum is likely to undermine Great First Eight's implementation. First, such practices may take time in the children's day that is actually needed for full implementation of Great First Eight. Second, such practices may be incompatible with the curriculum. For example, a "behavior management" approach that involves using tokens and prizes to reward good behavior is incompatible with the Great First Eight approach. Great First Eight does not bribe children for appropriate behavior but rather teaches children to behave appropriately for the benefit of themselves and their community. Third, some approaches that have long been used in schools, as well as some practices that have become popular more recently, are actually not supported by research. In Great First Eight, we privilege practices that are supported by research studies. For these and other reasons, it is likely that adopting Great First Eight will require a willingness to let go of some practices you and teachers have used in the past that are incompatible with Great First Eight.
- 3. Align to the 15 Design Principles used to develop the Great First Eight Curriculum** (see graphic on the website immediately above this document). The 15 design principles permeate the curriculum and influenced myriad decisions made during curriculum development. So, it's important that you are open to aligning with the intentions behind the design principles; we will help you see how they can be enacted in practice. For example, if you and teachers can be convinced that research is useful for informing classroom practice, that girls can excel in math and science, that families of Black and Brown children are deeply committed to their children's education, that schools need to attend to children's social development, and that children can make meaningful decisions about their own learning, then Great First Eight is more likely to be the right curriculum for you.
- 4. Start using the curriculum before Grade 1.** It is unlikely that children will be successful with the rigor of the curriculum in Grade 1 or later if they haven't started with the curriculum at least one year prior to that (i.e., in kindergarten or earlier). And the more years that children experience the curriculum, the more successful they are likely to

be. So, if you focus on kindergarten education, consider whether you might be able to co-adopt the curriculum with preschool settings in your community; if you focus on preschool education, consider whether you might co-adopt the curriculum with infant and toddler settings in your community; and so on.

5. Provide all of the necessary materials for implementing the curriculum. Although the curriculum itself and many related materials are provided for free, there are expenses associated with implementing the curriculum, such as the cost of materials for science investigations, toys, specific children’s books, and so on. There is also printing involved, not of the curriculum itself but of items such as posters in infant and toddler classrooms and books for helping children learn to read. To determine the costs involved in implementing, please look carefully at the list of materials needed for the curriculum at that age/grade level. Materials lists are located in GreatGate, which can be accessed by creating a (free) account and logging in. Unfortunately, we are unable to provide a precise estimate regarding the cost to implement because so many factors (e.g., what materials are already on hand, what businesses the educational organization orders from, size of classes) affect the cost.

Please note that for Grades K and above, one-to-one devices (specifically, tablets or touch-screen laptops), styluses, and headphones need to be available for every child, along with particular apps that we specify in the Materials Lists. At the preschool level, a minimum of four such devices should be available in each classroom. Other technological requirements include reliable high-speed internet access in schools, large-screen tablets or computers for teachers to access the online curriculum in their classrooms (including in infant, toddler, and preschool classrooms), technology for teachers to take photos and videos, and a computer projector or smart board in preschool through second grade classrooms.

6. Engage in all of the professional learning required for the curriculum. Implementing a curriculum well requires extensive and ongoing professional learning. Great First Eight provides a vast amount of professional learning materials

for free, with more being developed as needs and requests arise. The professional learning materials come with facilitator guides so that someone(s) at your site, such as a coach (ideally) or teacher leader, can lead the professional learning. Great First Eight requires 30 hours of foundational professional learning—with colleagues, if at all possible—before implementing the first day of the curriculum and many additional hours of professional learning throughout the first year of implementation. In addition, there are professional learning materials that childcare and school settings can choose among based on their particular needs and goals. Teachers implementing Great First Eight at any age/grade level should have at least WEEKLY time set aside to engage with colleagues in professional learning and planning. In addition, teachers should have at least DAILY time to plan individually or with colleagues. The Great First Eight team feels strongly that teachers should be paid for time spent in professional learning and planning. So, depending on how your care setting or school is set up, this may be a significant additional expense associated with implementing the Great First Eight Curriculum. If infrastructure is not available for these components, you might consider working toward that goal before adopting the curriculum.

7. Ensure that all key stakeholders are “on board.” Great First Eight implementation is not likely to go well if there is not understanding of and support for the curriculum throughout the system. For example, if a childcare center director values children staying clean at all times, there are important sensory experiences involved in Great First Eight that may be missed. Or, if a principal believes the hallmark of a good classroom is children sitting quietly at their desks to complete worksheets, their guidance and feedback to teachers is likely to undermine Great First Eight implementation. Or, if an interventionist teaches reading in a manner that is not aligned with scientific research on reading, children in Great First Eight classrooms may receive mixed messages about how to read and spell words. Everyone—leaders, coaches, interventionists, specials teachers, playground and lunchroom supervisors, and others—need to be aligned with the Great First Eight approach to maximize children’s positive learning experiences.

Families are our most important stakeholders of all. We have extensive materials for engaging families in the Great First Eight Curriculum—both for them to learn from Great First Eight and for educators to learn from families by incorporating into the curriculum families’ expertise and goals for their children. For example, families are often invited to share information and stories with children that are related to the projects that are a part of each curricular unit.

8. Align assessments, teacher evaluations, and other components of the system.

Great First Eight is likely to involve replacing many of your currently used assessments with assessments we provide that are aligned with the curriculum. Using assessments misaligned with Great First Eight is one of the most dangerous threats to successful use of Great First Eight. For example, if an assessment tests phonics patterns we haven’t taught yet and doesn’t assess the patterns we have taught, the assessment will provide erroneous information about where children are in their phonics development and even incentivize teachers to stray from our phonics scope and sequence, which is carefully aligned with research. Similarly, we do not believe that posting on the board and announcing to children which Common Core or other standard is being addressed in a lesson makes any sense for young children (and there is no research evidence we are aware of to indicate that it does); we have other ways of

guiding and motivating children’s learning. If a teacher evaluation system calls for posting and announcing standards, then a teacher teaching in accordance with Great First Eight would be rated lower. Likewise, in the infant and toddler years, using an assessment system designed to align with a different curriculum would be confusing for both teachers and families and would not allow teachers, families, or administrators to see children’s growth and learning accurately. So again, alignment across all areas in the system is important to making Great First Eight work. We provide a number of tools, and we welcome requests for additional tools that will support successful implementation.

9. Commit for at least three years.

It is often said that it takes three years for a teacher to become proficient at implementing a new curriculum and three to five years for an educational reform initiative to take hold. It does not make sense, therefore, to adopt a curriculum for a year and then abandon it in favor of a new curriculum. The investment is too high and the payoff not yet high enough. Although this is true for nearly any curriculum, it is certainly true for Great First Eight as a curriculum that is full-day, interdisciplinary, and quite different from curricula you and teachers may have used in the past. When considering whether to adopt Great First Eight, we urge you to consider whether you can make at least a three-year (preferably five-year) commitment.

For more information about the pathbreaking Great First Eight Curriculum, please contact us at greatfirsteight@umich.edu.